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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAMAKO 000636

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TAGS: PREL PTER EAID ML  
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S FAREWELL CALL WITH PRESIDENT TOURE

REF: BAMAKO 00627

BAMAKO 00000636 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: Ambassador Terence P. McCulley, Reasons 1.4. (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: President Amadou Toumani Toure (ATT) effusively praised the state of U.S.-Malian relations during the Ambassador's July 3 farewell call, citing specifically the Millennium Challenge Compact and bilateral military cooperation. The president said he was reluctant to see an exchange of money in the resolution of the Austrian hostage situation for fear of the future consequences. ATT expressed familiar reservations about the Special Mixed Units given the history of Tuareg military desertion, and skepticism about their likely effectiveness against terrorists. ATT said he hoped to convene his proposed regional security summit in July, but that "problems remained."

¶2. (SBU) Outstanding Cooperation: The Ambassador's farewell call with ATT featured a glowing review of U.S. assistance to Mali in areas ranging from development assistance to military cooperation. On MCC, he said the compact's focal point at the presidency had just updated him on the status of the compact, and he had been delighted to hear that Mali's progress placed it among the furthest advanced compacts to date. The Ambassador added that activities would be starting soon, but expressed concern that MCC's Malian counterpart organization had still not appointed a Director General. ATT agreed that this was an important next step. On military cooperation, he praised the quality of American training, observing that his own very first parachute jump had been during a bilateral military exercise with the U.S.

¶3. (C) Special Mixed Units: The Ambassador noted that a Joint Exercise would soon kick off in Timbuktu, and he hoped that as security circumstances permit, training could extend to farther northern locations such as Tessalit. He added that we expected to have an answer soon on the delivery of the variety of military equipment Mali had requested. ATT agreed with the importance of an effective military presence in the north to constrain the presence of "certain entities," and in Tessalit in particular, as this location is key to securing the border and thus the zone. The President observed that only the previous day, there had been a clash between rival drug factions that had led to fatalities. Referring to positive developments in Algiers between the Government of Mali and Tuareg rebels, the Ambassador reiterated U.S. readiness to support the Special Units. He suggested that one possible role that would also enhance their training and equipment might be in the context of a deployment to Somalia. ATT replied that this would indeed

require additional training, since the existing skills set of special unit participants would not really extend to peace keeping operations. More generally, the President stressed the confidence problem linked to the issue of the units' command given the serial desertions with their Malian army supplies by Tuareg rebels, including the first unit's commander, Hassan Fagaga. He expressed some uneasiness with "Algeria's vision and Fagaga's dream" for the special units, since ATT does not believe they could be counted on to be effective against terrorists. He allowed, however, that Mali was not closed to the overall concept of the units. He expressed the hope that a "young, trustworthy" individual could be identified to lead the units, and that restored peace would allow the Malian army to turn to "other tasks." (See also reftel.)

¶4. (C) Austrian Hostages: ATT described the Austrian hostage situation as "an embarrassment" for Mali, since clearly the terrorists' decision to move their hostages from Tunisia to northern Mali reflected Mali's inability to control its territory. He said the situation was a difficult one for Mali, which is stuck between a humanitarian issue and realism. While Mali's friends have asked them to help secure the release of the hostages, he has to take into account that their kidnappers are terrorists. Locating the hostages is not a difficult matter, but any financial transaction would create a new threat not only of further hostage takings, but of adding money to the terrorists' coffers. While the Austrians have pleaded the situation of the hostages as a humanitarian matter, ATT wryly noted that casualties in terrorist attacks in Algeria are a humanitarian issue, too. He said he would not involve ransom in their release without a green light from Algeria to do so, which he found it unlikely Algeria would give for just such reasons. He mused

BAMAKO 00000636 002.2 OF 002

that a "clean and neat" military rescue operation would not be possible without Algeria's help.

¶5. (C) Regional Security Summit: The President said that in principle his proposed regional security summit is to occur in July, but "problems remained" for its organization. He described one of these as his error in conveying an invitation to Morocco to attend, only to learn later that the Algerians were vehemently opposed to Moroccan participation.

¶6. (C) Comment: The Ambassador's farewell call met a concise reflection of ATT's view of the security concerns that face northern Mali. His suspicion of Tuareg elements is rooted in a notable history of Tuareg rebel desertion and active rebellion against the government; his definition of security threats in northern Mali extends not only to international terrorists, but to drug and contraband traffickers. His doubts on Algeria's view of the role of the special units are a reminder that ATT's welcoming of cooperation and assistance on security matters is naturally rooted in how he views such help may practically address the range of threats he perceives in his complicated northern Mali.

LEONARD